

Teacher Support Staff Superintendent Advisory
4:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 27, 2014
Administration Building – 215 S. 6th Street West

Members: Adriel Shearer, Alex Apostle, Anthony Zook, Avis Chenoweth, Bradford Herron, Camille Barraclough, Carol MacIntyre, Cathleen Armstrong, Connie Pederson, Crista Anderson, Dave Burtch, Diane Anderson, Elizabeth McGrath, Hatton Littman, Janice Nugent, Karen Allen, Mary McAllister, Melanie Charlson, Melissa Lynn, Sarah Lee, Sheri Postma, Tricia Owens

Present: Alex Apostle, Diane Anderson, Adriel Shearer, Connie Pederson, Burley McWilliams, Trevor Laboski, Camille Barraclough, Jane McAllister, Crista Anderson, Janice Nugent, Karen Allen, Mark Thane, Hatton Littman

Not Present: Anthony Zook, Avis Chenoweth, Brad Herron, Carol MacIntyre, Cathleen Armstrong, Dave Burtch, Elizabeth McGrath, Melanie Charlson, Melissa Lynn, Sarah Lee, Sheri Postma, Tricia Owens

NOTES

Superintendent Alex Apostle opened the meeting at 4:02 p.m. He thanked everyone present for being on time.

When we left last time, we determined we would use the PIR day in September to have a moment to share with our colleagues the good things happening in our district. Based on that you were going to go back out, get a feel for things and report back. [Hatton Littman arrived.] Alex: we understand the importance of the PIR day. This is an opportunity for our school board to get a feeling for where the schools are at, where they have been, and where they are going. Alex said he has experienced close to 30 new board members in 6 years. Bringing them up to speed on the achievement taking place is important. Being consistent in our efforts is important. This is an opportunity to toot our own horn. He noted that someone said we should not toot our own horn. If we do not, who will? Public education has not done a good job of putting forth the good things happening in our public schools, the challenges we face, and yet we achieve great results. Alex said he does not buy that. He told committee members that he is interested in what they have to bring back to this meeting.

Adriel: in April we discussed and achieved consensus that there would not be PowerPoint and other media put into this; that presentations would be 3-5 minutes tops, for each school; and that it would not be department level either, due to time constraints. Adriel said he is not sure where the break in communication was, but Melanie brought it to members of the union in terms of PowerPoint and department presentations as well. The reaction to that, he thinks, was not very positive. He thinks if anyone had a chance to read the feedback she forwarded, it seems pretty universally against it. Adriel has clarified that for members of Sentinel to make sure we understood that it was not formal, not a presentation, not by departments, but more informal. In spite of that clarification it still seems that some people think it is not a good idea, and that there

are other things we could or should be doing. Adriel said to him, it comes down to an opportunity cost. What is most valuable for that 3 hours in that PIR day—this, for us as a district, or training on some new technology that we are inadequate on? He is on the fence. It is a PIR day. Are there 3 hours available there? He is not sure.

Diane Anderson noted that it is tough being in a department and not really in a school. She thinks the school voice is the one we need to listen to. We have 1200 people for whom we are trying to get a sense of where they are and how they view things. Classified people kind of just roll with it, because that is what we do. Food service or others not scheduled to work are unlikely to attend; some live out of town. She said it would have been helpful to have the minutes available; we would have had a clear understanding. She is not sure if they are posted. Email is not the best communication. It would have been great. She had a different sense than others did. When she explains to people, they get her perspective. It would be nice to have those for people to read. Alex said we will make sure they are posted to the Wiki.

Karen noted the challenge of how to get everyone's voice in a reasonable period of time. Some of us got involved who were not in the April discussion: instead of changing 3-5 people 20 times, we could invite each school to send us some pictures of what they are doing, and ask them to respond to the questions where have they been, where are they now, and where are they going, so we are all saying what we are about. That is something we probably never talked about here. Things morph as life goes through. Karen said she could see that as a 3-5 minute PowerPoint, or that Hatton would put it all together into one, and make it celebratory but not overwhelming. Hatton: so the effort that each school puts into making those statements could be modular-esque. It could be a living document, posted on the website, that would allow one set of messaging to live on in a variety of formats, talking about the school district in the voices of each building.

Diane: there were so many things talked about, it was unclear. And the last meeting we had, some people were not here; we were getting different voices. Conceptually it is great: having short presentations is great. They don't know if this is the best format, or not necessarily that it should come at this date.

Burley: the first meeting he has attended is this one. This is a chance for everyone in the district to see what other schools are doing, to see what the district as a whole is doing, the things to be proud of. There is not a venue where we all get together and do that. He sees the benefit.

Trevor said he thought we were here to discuss what it was going to look like, not whether we are going to have it. From his experience with every board he has ever worked for, if you do not tell them what you are doing and show them you are moving forward, then their agenda will creep in and they will tell you what you will be doing. He read the feedback—was that all the feedback? Adriel thinks that is what Melanie received. Trevor commented that often feedback comes mostly from those who are not happy. As representatives of various groups, we have to think of the people who are out there working at all hours and trying things, who would like everyone to see what they are doing and the effort they are putting in.

Jane said she was a little surprised. At Lewis & Clark, they are very proud of what they are doing. Yet they were adamantly opposed to doing anything: both the beginning barbecue and

holding off to PIR day; they wanted no part of it. They said we are always asking for time together as a staff, and that they don't want to go out and do something district wide. She told them it does not have to be long, and it can be simple, but they did not want to do it. Every one of them said no. Jane said both she and Susan were surprised; it was not what they were expecting.

Trevor: is it the time of year we are asking? Jane said it could be. They are overwhelmed. To everything we ask, they say we need more time. We are working crazily on IB units; we have 4 more we have to write, and this is something that will take away from it. Back to tooting your horn for the board: Jane suggested when the board members come and do drive bys in the classroom, it would be great if you could get the board members to spend some time. She once invited board members in to watch her teach a math lesson and to watch another teacher teach a reading lesson, and they came away totally enlightened. She made mistakes, but it gave her an opportunity to sit down and explain why she is doing what she is doing. She would encourage that kind of thing more than a 3-5 minute presentation by staff. If board members take some time out of their year to spend some significant time in each schools, that will toot our horn quicker and better.

Janice commented that the people she interacted with had much the same reaction. We still have a journey in our district to reunite. There is still a lot of hurt. She did not quite realize the extent of it. People are very used to having PIR. Janice asked if this is the 4th year we had a barbecue in the beginning—people seem to think we have been doing it forever. Alex said that he arrived in 2008: we had the event at Sentinel, and then a 2nd one, then we went to the barbecue for 4 years. Janice: people thought it was a huge change, and that it did not carry on the spirit of PIR because it was not instructionally related. Some people thought it was intended as a slap in the face for schools that are not doing special projects so they would be shamed in front of schools that are—she said it blew her away, but she does not think we should do it. Somebody said it was supposed to be pictures and PowerPoints. Janice said she said no, it is informal and spontaneous, but no one wanted to do it. Alex said he appreciates her bringing it forward.

Camille said at Meadow Hill, 50% of the 30 who replied said no, thanks. They wanted to stay in the building and have time. More preferred breakfast over lunch. They were concerned about competition between schools, highlighting my strength that's your weakness, and about using the money for students instead of staff.

Crista said she received favorable responses about the timing of not having it the first couple of days; many were relieved. They thought breakfast was good. She picked up on the competition piece also. She was hearing that the same 3 questions would level the playing field. If that message were relayed, it might be something that people could grab onto more easily.

Mark commented that to him, one of the really important pieces is that we work to continue to develop a sense of community as a district. What he is hearing leads him to conclude that is really critical, whether it is through the presentations or something else. To hear about the divisions and the viewing of it as a competition is disheartening. He does not think that was the intent. We need to bring staff together and know that we have a common purpose.

Connie polled the entire staff and got 12 responses. It was disheartening. Those who responded preferred doing it in the morning, on the PIR day. They preferred to have breakfast, go back into buildings, and work. She thinks that sense of community is not there, probably because we are so large, spread out everywhere, and moving from one place to another.

Karen commented that she has been here long enough to recall that there was a time that the sense of community was not in the building. Teachers did not want to share with each other because it would be considered a competition. She said she has a wonderment: are we moving into territory we have not been in before? It is a good sign: we are in a place where we were not.

Hatton commented that off the cuff, as someone who has just joined the district, she is personally disheartened. As a professional communicator who does this for other organizations, she thinks it should be somewhere in between informal and formal presented content, in order to save time; that it would be good to have it be a useful document that could live on in other ways, and to have everyone feel proud. She thinks the sense of competition is heightened if it is more informal. So she thinks it would be good creating a mediated something, a PowerPoint, a video, something that is an equalizing force. She thinks it is important that we have some kind of unifying theme. She understands the off the cuff teacher response of having so much to do that they don't want to drive across town and take the time. From the district wide view, she understands it is important to see what each other is doing in not a competitive way but an inspiring way. It was never the intention to shame others; no one would present their content in a way that would be intended that way. Everyone could use that feeling reflectively to examine what you are doing in your building and what you would like to be doing in your building.

Alex said first, he appreciates and values that you went out and that you did a very nice job. He appreciates that. Secondly, he would like some time to reflect on what was said. He thinks there may be some middle ground. This is one thing that you would hope people would be involved with and be happy about it. We did mention it would be a presentation of where the school has been, where it is, and where it is going; that was pretty clearly outlined. He would like to reflect on what you have said. He knows you have not had a chance to go out and ask 1200 people how they feel. The fact you have done your work—he respects that a lot. Let's have all of us reflect. This is an extremely busy time of year. We have all worked very hard, and we are coming to the close of the school year. Timing is very important when talking about these types of issues. He would like to revisit this in the fall. Maybe we can find out what the staff would like to do. On the first day, we can have a breakfast or a barbecue, and then come back and discuss how we can communicate our successes. He thinks Hatton was sending us in the right direction, the middle ground. We don't force people to do this. This is a time to be excited and rejoice and to share our successes. If it is not working at this time, he does not want it to permeate the effort or activity. We want people to feel good about what we are trying to do. Do you think we could go ahead with a breakfast or barbecue before school starts?

Adriel said he thinks a breakfast would be good, in which people go there for a time, and then go back to the buildings by lunch. Alex: or earlier. Karen: we could have breakfast, see everyone, and say a few words to welcome people. Alex suggests an hour; then everyone reports to their building, then we sit down and figure out how to celebrate our accomplishments. We will let that go for now; we can have breakfast the first day back.

Alex told everyone he hopes they stay with this committee. We will come back together and figure out the best way to celebrate that people will be receptive to.

Diane noted that she thinks a lot of people said they would like healthy alternatives, and she thinks that with a breakfast it is easier to do that. Hatton: fruit, bagels, something like the zero hour activity, Healthy Kids Summit.

Mark asked about the engagement of the classified staff and about food service workers who don't normally work that day because we are not serving lunch. He wants to think all-inclusive. He agrees it is a good middle ground for now.

There was agreement from all to do the breakfast, and later to celebrate at another time.

Karen mentioned the camaraderie, to get people together, and to say we have not seen each other.

Hatton noted the goal to welcome everyone back, engage with friends we have not seen, and to engage in unity.

Alex: then we figure out if it will be something from each school we put on the website. Alex stated that we will clarify with the minutes the intent of this meeting and where we ended up, and he thinks it will work out fine.

The meeting ended at 4:33 p.m.